

# EPA, DEPE to probe watershed pollution



Perth Amboy Mayor Joseph Vas looks over a well at the city's Runyon Watershed in Old Bridge

Photo by Vic Yepello

By TOM HAYDON

Federal and state environmental officials surveying Perth Amboy's Runyon Watershed yesterday announced plans to more closely examine the impact of subsurface water pollution on the city's wells.

John Osolin, project manager for the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), said a joint effort is being planned with the state Department of Environmental Protection and Energy (DEPE) to dig more monitoring wells around Perth Amboy's water well No. 6.

Mayor Joseph Vas met with EPA and DEPE officials yesterday at the city's offices at the watershed. Although owned by the city, the watershed is within the borders of neighboring Old Bridge Township.

At least part of the watershed has been polluted by chemicals from what has been declared a federal superfund site, the CPS-Madison site, which is named for two nearby companies, CPS Chemical and Madison Industries.

The firms were found responsible for polluting the groundwater under their properties, and in January 1991, after more than 10 years of litigation, the two companies began pumping water from the ground to remove the pollution.

"The cleanup has been containing a large part of the contamination," said Osolin. However, he noted, "there seems to be an area near well six that we don't have enough data on."

Among the EPA officials at the watershed meeting was a representative of the agency's emergency response and remediation

division.

Osolin said emergency work to ensure the safety of the water wells was an option now being considered.

Perth Amboy has pushed for increased action by the state and federal agencies because tests on water samples from well No. 6 show the presence of the chemical compound chlorobenzene.

For the past year, the city has paid for weekly tests on water samples from the well. The tests show the levels of chlorobenzene have fluctuated from undetectable to 12.4 parts per billion of water.

Vas said water from well No. 6 is being mixed with water from wells free of contamination, then processed to ensure there is no safety risk.

The mayor said the tests show a cycle in the watershed of the chemical levels rising and then dropping. But, he said, the levels for the end of December 1991 were lower than the levels for the same period the preceding year.

He called it "ironic" that the DEPE, because of the pollution, has prohibited the city from dumping the water from well No. 6 back into the ground, but yet Perth Amboy is able to pump the water into the city treatment plant to process as drinking water.

The city is seeking to have the companies remove all the pollution.

"Perth Amboy deserves the quality of water that the residents enjoyed 20 years ago, before the chemical companies began polluting the water," Vas said.

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